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# SCIENCE

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## PROFITABLE AND FRUITLESS LINES OF ENDEAVOR IN PUBLIC HEALTH WORK<sup>1</sup>

It is in accord with the spirit of this Congress to consider public health questions either from the point of view of things already accomplished by the application of the scientific method or from that of things to be done. I have chosen to speak especially of "the saving of waste and increase of efficiency" still to be expected when public health problems are approached in a scientific spirit.

It is well recognized to-day by many experts that while some of the ordinary activities of municipal health departments are of unquestionable value in conserving the health of a community, others are relatively ineffective or possibly worthless. One well-known writer<sup>2</sup> has thus expressed himself on this point:

I boldly assert that if every case of communicable disease were promptly reported to the proper local board of health and as promptly placed under effective sanitary control and so kept until danger of infection had passed, all the other present-day activities of boards of health, whether local, state or national, with the exception of those directed against certain causes of infant mortality, and the possible further exception of some food and drug inspection, might be dropped with no appreciable effect upon the general health or mortality of any of our states or most of our cities.

In all fairness it must be admitted that a part of the energy of almost every municipal health department in this country

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented before the Congress of Technology, Boston, April 10, 1911, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the granting of the charter to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

<sup>2</sup> M. N. Baker, chairman Committee on Municipal Health and Sanitation, National Municipal League.